



Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council

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Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Highlands Council Weighs Policy Decisions

Chester, NJ - The Highlands Council will hold the first of four September work sessions today, aimed at weighing key decisions necessary in the Regional Master Plan development. The day's four topics are open waters, stream corridors, significant natural areas, and wastewater treatment infrastructure. Additional topics will be covered in the subsequent meetings. The work session discussions will help with preparation of the draft Regional Master Plan that the Council is scheduled to consider and release for public comment in late October.

The Council has been rigorously developing and refining scientific data that will form the basis for the Regional Master Plan. Each topical data layer will be incorporated into the Plan based on the Council's work, ultimately defining the Plan.

"The Council's work sessions allow for essential discussion and debate on the most important policy decisions regarding how the data is applied in the Plan. This is the culmination of months of science-based planning and data development," said Dante Di Pirro, executive director of the Highlands Council.

Discussion of each topic will drive the Regional Master Plan development and fulfill the Plan goals. In furtherance of their policy debate, the Council's geographic information system allows the members to visualize the issues and the potential impact of their policy options.

The work sessions are open to the public. No votes will be taken. Public input is welcomed in writing or by email at rmpcomments@highlands.state.nj.us. Furthermore, a number of members will be available to meet with interested members of the public following each work session. These informal public comment periods will convene 15 minutes after the close of the work session and allow members of the public to speak directly with Council and staff members.

Council Chairman John Weingart affirmed the Council's interest in hearing from the public saying, "Our process since we began has been an open and inclusive one. We maintain numerous channels for feedback and have taken the extra step of adding an availability session in order to ensure that we hear from our stakeholders. I think most people interested in the work of the Highlands Council are anxious for us to adopt a draft plan that they can review and comment upon in the six public hearings we will be holding later this year."

Topics planned for the September 14th work session will be released shortly. This session is the only one scheduled to start at 4:00 pm; all others begin at 10:00 am.

In August 2004, the New Jersey Legislature enacted the Highland Water Protection and Planning Act in order to protect over 850,000 acres which supply drinking water for more than sixty-five percent of New Jersey's residents. The Highlands Act created the Highlands Council as a regional planning entity charged with protecting the water resources and natural beauty of the New Jersey Highlands while allowing for planned, sustainable development and redevelopment of the region. The fifteen Council members include a broad and representative range of elected officials from Highlands municipalities and counties, as well as individuals with diverse backgrounds and area perspectives.

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